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**AFLC QUALITY:
DEVELOPING A BLUEPRINT FOR EXCELLENCE**

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of continuous process improvement is a journey made up of definable stages and events. AFLC began its initiative in 1987. At present, the building blocks are in place to move the Command into its next phase of quality improvement. The AFLC quality implementation initiative is designated QP4 which stands for Quality = People + Process + Performance + Product.

Quality improvement begins with a shared dedication to quality and the understanding of the fundamentals elements of quality improvement. These elements are sometimes called Quality or Organization Values. We recognize five elements which consistently distinguish a successful quality organization from one that is less successful. They are:

Customer Satisfaction. We constantly supply products and services that link us to both internal and external customers. To better meet the needs of these customers we must constantly work to meet their often changing requirements;

Total Involvement. Everyone in the organization must accept and share the responsibility for quality.

Measurement. Measurement is done for one reason...to improve. We measure quality by continuously monitoring our standards of achievement against a baseline.

Systematic Support. All organizational systems and infrastructure must support and reinforce the principles of QP4.

Continuous Process Improvement. Constantly working on ways to improve all processes is key to customer satisfaction. An organization must constantly challenge itself to improve products and services. By doing so we can correct and prevent problems and make improvements.

This paper will focus on what AFLC is doing to support the successful implementation of QP4. In doing so it will describe the vision process, the AFLC vision, predictable stages of AFLC quality evolution and the strategies designed to successfully implement QP4 within AFLC.

INTRODUCTION

Since Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC) launched its quality improvement initiative in October 1987, we have seen a dramatic change in the ways we manage and in the ways that people approach their jobs. There have been improvements in many AFLC processes through employee team efforts, and a greater emphasis towards customer satisfaction. In addition, senior management has initiated actions to ensure that the continuous quality improvement

initiative, called Quality = People + Process + Performance + Product or QP4, will survive times of turbulence and uncertainty. At the very essence of quality leadership is developing a vision and a clear understanding of what AFLC is trying to achieve.

DEVELOPING A VISION

Until recently, most planning by American business and government was designed to respond to needs. Needs that most often equate to market problems, reductions in productivity and threats to security or competitive position. Awareness is now growing in the power of inspiring performance and actually creating the future through the process of visioning.

An organizational vision puts planning in a much larger context. With a vision created, organizational leaders must make business decisions that are clearly in alignment with achieving the vision. Thus, the vision can give meaning to work as well as direction.

A vision should mobilize and energize a work force, especially when they feel that the vision is achievable and meaningful and they personally, can add value to the organization and make a real (versus perceived) difference.

In the 1960's President John F. Kennedy established a national vision to land an American on the moon and return him safely to earth. This vision was literally translated into a practical philosophy, value system, leadership practices, mission statement, goals and objectives and a plan for prioritizing actions that ultimately led to its achievement.

In Thriving On Chaos, Tom Peters states that developing a vision and living it are essential elements of leadership. For AFLC, its vision and living it is the key to solving the unknowns the Command is facing in the decade ahead.

THE AFLC VISION

In the September 1989 and February 1990 the AFLC Commander conducted a vision workshop with his senior leadership. The resultant vision was "**Partners in Excellence.**" This theme reflects a strong orientation toward the customer, calls for leadership and teamwork to achieve continuous improvement and sets the Command's goal for the next ten years. It represents "constancy of purpose" regardless of political, economic or other influence and suggests a full partnership with leaders, customers, workforce, and vendors. Four essential elements of the vision include People, Quality, Mission and Shaping the Environment.

People — Power for Change. This element addresses the desired management style, i.e., leadership, trust, teamwork, environment free of fear, and people empowerment (employee involvement, innovation, responsibility and accountability).

Quality — World Class Quality Leader. This element addresses continuous quality improvement, product and service reliability, process control, and setting the continuous quality improvement standards in the Department of Defense (DoD).

Mission — Combat Strength Through Logistics. Simply, is customer satisfaction and meeting the logistics needs of the customer efficiently with regard to timeliness, product and service quality, reliability, serviceability, and reasonable cost.

Shaping the Environment. Quality requires an adhocracy, that is, a structure with a flattened authority system which is connected by interactive and transactive work groups managed and lead by leaders who lead through vision, example, motivation, empowerment and support. We must create a stimulating internal environment, influence the external environment and shape the physical environment within this new system.

QP4 is one of the processes to be used to articulate and achieve the command vision. It is a philosophy directed at making leadership a desired style of management; teamwork, a source of positive employee, customer, and vendor involvement; and organized continuous process improvement, the normal business strategy. To make this happen we must understand what happens to an organization undergoing change and the phases that they will "typically" proceed through enroute to vision achievement.

PHASES OF QP4 IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of QP4 will proceed through predictable phases. At any given period during QP4 implementation different organizations will be evolving at different rates. Within any organization different stages of QP4 may be present.

The following five phases of QP4 are important to AFLC for the purpose of planning organization-wide deployment which demands constant attention and continuous application of energy. These phases include:

Readiness Phase. This phase is marked by variation in understanding of continuous quality improvement, its relevance to the individual and organization, its compatibility with the current management styles and its staying power as a lasting force in AFLC.

Resistance Phase. Although resistance is encountered in every stage of implementation, this phase will be most dramatic at the end of the initial introduction to continuous quality improvement, or about 18 months into the process.

Expansion Phase. While some organizations are bogged down in QP4, others will be moving ahead. Critical mass of QP4 will be achieved through reduction of long-standing problems. This will serve to inoculate QP4 as a work ethic and reduce further resistance as converts take up the QP4 process in their work areas and breed more successes.

Integration Phase. In this phase the QP4 ethic will be incorporated into daily routines. Supportive systems, such as performance appraisals, promotions, planning and budgeting, will become aligned with QP4 and reinforce it as a way of life in AFLC.

Regeneration Phase. In this phase organizations will appear to be "reborn" as cultural transformation, promised by QP4, becomes a reality. Organizations will be aligned, horizontally and vertically, in pursuit of strategies aimed at continuously improving mission effectiveness.

These phases represent what many private industries have experienced in implementing total quality management. They were developed by Organizational Dynamics, Incorporated, Boston, Massachusetts, who has assisted the AFLC implementation effort.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING QP4

The actions driving the evolution of QP4 forward throughout AFLC, are a portfolio of interrelated implementation strategies. These strategies define the framework for QP4 deployment and are intended to provide macro-guidance to functional organizations that will result in their action plan development. When executed in a coordinated, command-wide model, they form the AFLC blueprint for quality excellence. This blueprint is a partnership of cooperation between management and workers that allows AFLC to achieve both its Command and Quality vision.

The AFLC vision for quality, to become a "World Class Quality Leader," will be achieved through integration of eight continuous improvement strategies. These strategies are not all inclusive, instead they provide a point of departure for an integrated, synchronous, command-wide implementation effort. These eight strategies are:

Commitment. Identifies the process of getting total work force involvement in QP4 and continuous improvement of all processes to satisfy the needs of our customers. It addresses how commitment will be generated and sustained over time.

Training. This strategy provides QP4 education and training for all levels of personnel. It also provides specific management and technical tools and techniques, training as required to implement and sustain QP4.

Targeting and Deployment. Defines the processes that will be targeted for priority improvement, who is responsible or the process owner and at what rate it will be applied across the organization.

Management Structure. Establishes the structure to set policy, implement policies within functional organizations, and pursue continuous improvement.

Resources. Ensures that the Command provides resources to effectively implement QP4 and that they are effectively and prudently applied.

Measurement. Addresses the timely assessment of the health of the Command operations according to QP4 principles.

Systems Alignment. Participants in QP4 are impacted by a variety of rules, regulations, policies and laws. This strategy outlines ways to address functional biases, remove organizational barriers, build teamwork and integrate organizational objectives.

Communication and Information. This strategy provides the mechanisms for internal, external, and crossfeed publicity and technical information to support QP4.

Figure 1 depicts the importance and impact of each of the strategies during each phase of QP4. These execution assumptions provide an implementation model for QP4 in the macro sense. The underlying success of the model depends upon the organizational strategies and action steps taken to fully execute QP4.

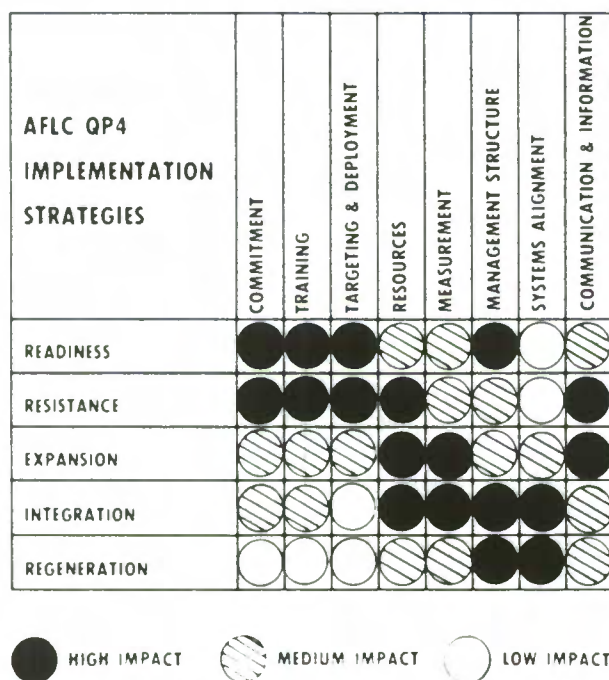


Figure 1.

CAN QUALITY HAPPEN HERE?

Implementing QP4 represents significant changes for individuals, groups and organizations. If everyone in the command is willing to take an active part in the transformation of AFLC from its present state to a quality culture, then the answer is yes. We will have to constantly remind ourselves that people tend not to resist or accept QP4, but rather the way it changes their lives. To this end, we will have to ensure that our internal systems are aligned towards QP4 and that QP4 symbolizes pleasure to our workforce, rather than pain.

The success of QP4 implementation will also be related to the degree of support from senior management as well as the rest of the organization. Our history with comparable initiatives, such as Zero Defects, Value Engineering, Quality Assurance, Quality Circles, etc., can be used as a predictor of

the degree of difficulty associated with QP4s institutionalization. Therefore, careful planning, monitoring and measurement will be imperative to foster success.

Additionally, the cost of implementing QP4 can be measured in time or resistance. The impatient acceleration of QP4 implementation can often mean paying more in the long term due to high resistance. The degree of change from the current state to QP4 will be a determinant of resistance and meeting success, the greater the change, the greater the difficulty.

BLUEPRINT FOR EXCELLENCE

It would be unfair to the reader to not show, via artistic license, an AFLC Quality Blueprint. It would be more unfair to say that the blueprint is static...will never change...to trust us, that this is it. The blueprint, Figure 2, is simple, adaptable, amendable, and will undoubtedly change. It is this authors expression of how the QP4 process is developing into a **Blueprint for Excellence**.

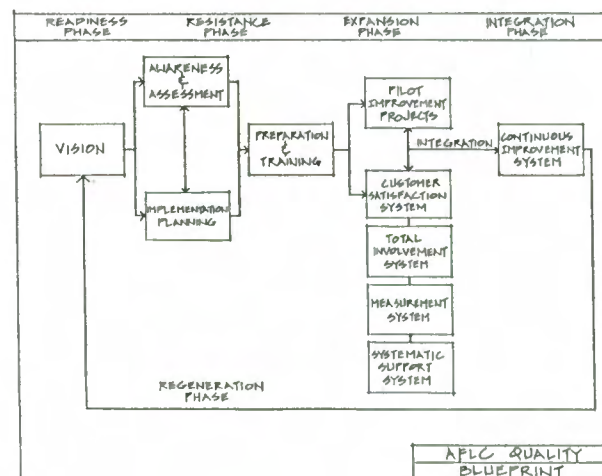


Figure 2.

(Note: Architectural drawing courtesy of Terry Aldridge, AIA, Kettering, Ohio.)

CONCLUSION

Our Commander summarized it well in January 1990, in An Open Letter to the Work Force. "The truth is, we are staking our future on QP4," stated General Charles C. McDonald, "We must have a future AFLC that is team oriented, streamlined, focused on continuous process improvement and committed to customer satisfaction - and that simply adds up to QP4."